

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge

2155 West Forest Street
Brigham City UT 84302
435.734.6422



Immediate Release

September 30, 2011

Waterfowl Opener and Botulism at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge

The Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge is currently experiencing a mild avian botulism outbreak that is affecting mainly waterfowl. Participants in the 2011 Waterfowl season may see dead and dying waterfowl in the public hunting areas. All hunt units will be open September 24 for access, including the Refuge Auto Tour Loop. Additionally, all hunt units should be at target water levels for this year's hunt.

Botulism is a common, recurring disease on the Refuge and other marshes around Great Salt Lake. Avian botulism is a paralytic disease caused by ingestion of a toxin produced by the bacteria, *Clostridium botulinum*. There are several types of toxin produced by strains of this bacteria; birds are most commonly affected by type C. The toxin affects the nervous system by preventing impulse transmission to muscles. Birds are unable to use their wings and legs normally or control neck and other muscles. Birds with paralyzed neck muscles cannot hold their heads up and often drown. Healthy birds, affected birds, and dead birds in various stages of decay are commonly found in the same area.

Botulism in humans is usually the result of eating improperly home-canned foods, which contain types A or B toxin. Type E toxin has been associated with improperly smoked fish. People, dogs, and cats are generally thought to be resistant to type C toxin, but a few cases have been reported in people and dogs. Thorough cooking destroys botulism toxin in food.

As a precaution, hunters should not target birds that are exhibiting signs of botulism nor let their dogs retrieve sick birds.

We expect to see the outbreak naturally decrease as fall temperatures cool, though it's not unusual for the disease to persist through October.

Further information can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/bearriver> or specific questions can be directed to 435.734.6422. Follow us on FACEBOOK and TWITTER.

END